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reporting

**C**OLD-CALLERS soliciting support for the Tory Party receive a variety of reactions. There are expletive-laden rants, yawns of indifference, the crack of a phone being put down — and on a few occasions sensible and interesting discussions.

This evening's calls were no different: 'Hello — my name's Philip. I'm ringing from the Conservative Party headquarters. Can you spare me a few minutes?'

But whatever the reaction, mild-mannered, softly spoken Philip, 59, was never put off his stride.

As a former chairman of Wimbledon Conservatives, he's used to parrying the verbal punches and even persuading some wavering or undecided electors to convert to the Tories.

And he has noted, with quiet satisfaction, that since Theresa May became Prime Minister those calls have been much more positive.

Modest and self-effacing, Philip never feels he should reveal to people at the other end of the line that he is in fact married to the Prime Minister.

As the first male consort in No 10 Downing Street since Sir Denis Thatcher, he feels — as did Sir Denis — that his duty is to stay one dutiful step behind his wife.

But quietly, as is his style, Philip is emerging as one of Mrs May's most important unsung advisers as he subtly takes a more hands-on role.

Every Prime Minister's spouse from Clementine Churchill to Samantha Cameron regularly attended Tory

**'They come as a team — and a very good team, too'**

fundraising events, pressed the flesh at party conferences and baked cakes for local association raffles.

But Philip May is the first to take an active position supporting the party in his own right — which explains his hitherto unknown involvement in telephone canvassing.

A former fund manager, he is seemingly a quieter character than raucous, snifter-drinking Sir Denis, whose image was crafted in the public imagination by Private Eye's Dear Bill columns. The imaginary letters were supposedly penned to his friend Lord Deedes, a former editor of the Daily Telegraph.

All the public really knows about Philip May is what we have seen in photographs, in which he is usually dressed in a sober suit, with his trademark designer spectacles, beaming next to his wife, sometimes giving her an affectionate peck on the cheek.

What we do know is that he is the son of a marketing manager for Dunlop, was brought up the eldest of four children in Merseyside and read History at Oxford — a subject he has never lost his love for.

But what is Philip May's day-to-day existence like?

Last Friday, after his wife returned from an official trip to Bahrain, he was at her side in her Maidenhead constituency attending the local Conservatives' Christmas buffet supper. The £30-a-head event, at a party member's Berkshire home, was a sell-out, with 90 people attending.

It was a million miles from the pomp and pageantry of a black-tie event at the Mansion House. But the supper of cold ham and cauliflower cheese, washed down with mineral water, is one of the social highlights of the association calendar. Philip never misses it.

For almost three hours, he worked

the room, talking to party activists — average age 60 and rising. Theresa and Philip were then driven in their armour-plated car to their home in nearby Sonning.

Geoff Hill, the chairman of Maidenhead Conservatives, explains: 'Philip is always with Theresa at our association events. He's a terrific supporter of our work. They come as a team, a very good team, too.'

On Saturday, Philip and his wife were spotted wheeling a trolley in the local Waitrose, stocking up for

the weekend. I'm told they usually do the shopping together.

And while David Cameron rarely missed a weekend at the PM's official country retreat Chequers, in Buckinghamshire, the Mays are there only about once a month.

They were at their Sonning home on Saturday afternoon and caught up with the highlights of England's Test match defeat at the hands of India.

The Mays are cricket fanatics to the point that the PM is given regular updates on the England

team's progress if they are playing during meetings at No 10. Former Yorkshire cricketer Sir Geoffrey Boycott is the couple's hero.

(In fact, it was over their shared love of cricket that Philip and Theresa's relationship flourished after they were introduced at Oxford by future Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto.)

Saturday evening is a time for them to catch up, as they rarely dine *a deux* in the week. Last weekend, Mrs May made dinner from a recipe in one of her 100

# The power behind Theresa's throne

**He's not glam like Sam Cam or as clubbable as Maggie's Denis. But Philip May is emerging as one of the PM's most important advisers**

**Mr Discretion: Theresa May and supportive spouse Philip. Inset: The couple in 1980**

cookbooks. When people ask her what is Philip's favourite dish, she replies: 'Whatever I make him.'

Philip uncorked a bottle of red wine and, after supper, the couple watched a documentary programme on the History Channel. She prefers the U.S. detective drama NCIS (Mrs May became hooked when she was Home Secretary), but this time his view prevailed.

On Sunday morning, after watching the Andrew Marr Show on BBC1 and wading through the Sunday newspapers, the Mays went to church before returning home for a traditional Sunday lunch of roast lamb and roast potatoes cooked in goose fat — a speciality of the PM.

They were back in Downing

**He helps her pick her kitten heels and handbags**

Street in the flat above No 11, which was also the home of David Cameron and his family, in time to watch the results of BBC1's *Strictly Come Dancing*.

They had one joint work function. Philip helped the PM choose the winning designs from schoolchildren in her constituency for their official Christmas card. The three winners depicted Larry the Downing Street cat and festive images of No 10.

Unlike Sir Denis, who had retired from a successful career in the oil industry by the time he entered Downing Street in 1979, Philip has a full-time job. He works for Capital Group, an American financial services company with assets of £1.1 trillion.

On Monday morning, over a breakfast of cereal and strong coffee, he flicked through the newspapers with BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme on in the background.

His wife's first meeting in No 10 starts at 8am, by which time Philip

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Picture: BEN CAWTHRA/LNP